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SOME NOTES ON THE EFFECT OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM UPON THE JEWISH RELIGION.

I.

THE so-called higher criticism of the Old Testament is becoming more and more acknowledged and accepted by Christian theologians of every school. From Mr. Gore upon the one hand to Professor Cheyne or the Bishop of Manchester upon the other, earnest and devout Christian clergymen are endeavouring to show how the results of that criticism may be harmonised with the teaching of Christ, nay, even with the dogmas of Christianity.

It is not surprising that from Jewish divines no attempts whatever of this kind are forthcoming. The Bible of Christianity contains a New Testament as well as an Old; so long as criticism is confined to the latter, the essential dogmas of Christianity remain undisturbed. We do not, therefore, find among the Christian theologians of England an equal readiness to assimilate and accept the higher criticism of the New Testament. Various arguments are put forward to show that the New Testament stands as regards criticism upon a very different footing from the Old, and that consequently (such is the implication) the miracles of the New Testament may well be credited, while those of the Old Testament may silently go by the wall.¹ If Christian clergymen show some natural hesitation in applying the same measure of criticism to either portion of their Bible, it is also natural that Jewish clergymen should hesitate in recognising or assimilating the criticism of the Old Testament. For that earlier half of the Christian Scripture constitutes the entire Bible of

¹ *Cp.* Professor Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, pp. xvi., xvii.

Judaism, and if its authority be undermined by criticism, Jews possess no second or superior Scripture on which to retreat. This book must bear the whole attack. Under the cover of the Old Testament, Christians can, for a time at least, shelter the New Testament from critical fire: Jews have no second line of defence. If this one be captured, the fort of revealed religion must, as they fancy, surrender without terms.

The most important result of Old Testament criticism is the disintegration of the Pentateuch. It is one which appears easily acceptable to Christians, but of very great difficulty to Jews. The consequence is that quite orthodox Christian clergymen are ready to admit that Moses did not compose the Pentateuch, and that the five books themselves are made up of many documents of various dates, pieced together, and modified in the piecing, by a number of different editors. Now the eighth article of the Jewish creed expressly asserts, "I believe with perfect faith that the whole law, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses, our teacher." The contradiction is obvious and insuperable. Either criticism or creed must be abandoned.

But the natural disinclination of Jewish clergymen to any dealings with criticism has a deeper reason. Christian theologians are attempting, as I have said, to assimilate Old Testament criticism with orthodox or semi-orthodox Christian theology. Will they succeed? A Theist or Jew can hardly help a smile at the strange metaphysical subtleties as to the person of Christ and the doctrine of *kenosis* of which they now make use. A difference in kind will scarcely be accepted for very long between the miracles of the Old Testament and the miracles of the New: if the former are already shaky, the latter will not long be seated securely. They who unconditionally accept the verdicts of literary and historical criticism and of comparative religion upon the Old Testament will before very long approach nearer and nearer to Unitarianism.

In Caleb Garth's words, "Things hang together." There is a real connection between criticism and a philosophy (whether experiential or *a priori*) which misdoubts, not the supernatural, but the miraculous. Has not criticism proved to a certainty the non-fulfilment of numerous Biblical prophecies? He who is willing to split up the Pentateuch into a number of independent documents, which have been added to, modified and pieced together before they reached their present form, cannot possibly hold the same view of inspiration, or the same disposition to credit Pentateuchal miracles, as the man who believes that the five books issued without a break from the divinely-guided hand of Moses. Take such a crucial point as the Sinaitic Revelation. Criticism shows that Exodus xix. is a conglomerate, that the Decalogue of Exodus xx. has been more than once revised and enlarged, that the importance assigned to it has been a matter of gradual growth within the Pentateuch itself, and that the date of its origin may be as late as the eighth or seventh century B.C. Accepting such results, who can believe in the literal truth of the revelation; who can still regard the Decalogue as the direct communication of God to man? Things do, indeed, hang together: the old faith cannot consort with the new criticism, and it would be idle to pretend that a full reconciliation is still within the limits of possibility.

Yet some reconciliation there must surely be. The present silence is fraught with danger. It seems insincere to desire a *via media*, or imperfect reconciliation, while at the same time not believing in the permanence of such an attempt. But the insincerity is only apparent. A Unitarian Christian may welcome the kind of reconciliation of orthodox Christianity with Old Testament criticism above alluded to, although he does not believe that the reconciliation can remain within the present limits. He may welcome these inadequate efforts in the interests of Christianity itself. For while he recognises that his own form of Christianity is the ultimate goal of the movement, he perceives that the

Church is very far from being prepared to leap the gulf that separates orthodoxy from Unitarianism at a single bound. That gulf must be bridged over so that men may pass across gradually, and not be lost in the blackness of the abyss beneath. Each step of the bridge will seem the final resting place to him who makes it, and yet each step will but lead to another. A similar argument applies to Judaism. Even he who is far removed from orthodoxy may yet honestly desire these imperfect reconciliations, if, though far removed from orthodoxy, he still claims to be a Jew.

To ignore criticism altogether is to run a tremendous risk. It is likely to make the chain of development in Judaism snap off altogether, and leave men utterly at sea. As the results of Old Testament criticism become more and more popular commonplaces, discussed in magazines and assumed in newspapers, it must surely soon behove the official teachers of Judaism to break the ice. Before it is too late, before men are inwardly lost to Judaism altogether, they must explain what is to be its relation to the criticism of the Bible. They should surely perceive that this relation is the burning question of the day upon the theoretical side, just as upon the practical side the question *par excellence* is the observance of the Sabbath. Few persons can track out a *via media* for themselves. Will not many believe that between the two roads to right and left there lies no pathway in the middle? Or without metaphor, will they not be inclined to say: "Either all or nothing?"

II.

But beyond the bridge which the efforts of orthodoxy and semi-orthodoxy should seek to build, does there lie any Jewish ground upon the other side? That phase of Unitarianism which both uncompromisingly accepts every critical conclusion and also rejects the miraculous, still claims the title of Christianity. Can a similar phase of

Judaism still assert its right to the old name? Can the men who profess it still regard themselves as Jews?

The answer to these questions clearly depends upon an answer to a further and more comprehensive one: What is Judaism? There is now abroad an answer to this last question, which, if true, should undoubtedly drive the Jewish Unitarian (if I may be permitted to use this strange expression to designate the man who stands to orthodox Judaism in something of the same relation as the modern Christian Unitarian stands to orthodox Christianity) out of the limits of Judaism. According to the theory which dominates that particular answer the least important part of that complex of belief and ceremonial commonly known as Judaism by the world at large is the most specifically Jewish. The essence of Judaism lies in its adjuncts. That this is no caricature of the theory of the *Breslauer Schule* and of Moses Mendelssohn will be readily apparent. For surely no ordinary orthodox Jew would deny that the essence of the Jewish religion lies in its peculiar theism. He would not deny that the most important parts of it are its doctrines respecting the nature and unity of God and his relation to humanity—the love of God by man and the rule of man by God—the moral law coloured and conditioned by its divine basis and author, the religious life on earth and the hope of immortality hereafter. It cannot be impugned that Judaism does hold and teach definite doctrines upon all these points. *Now, these doctrines are wholly unaffected by criticism.* It is, however, argued that since all of them may now-a-days be held and taught by a Theist as well as by a Jew they are not specifically Jewish. The differentiating qualities of Judaism lie precisely in those doctrines and practices, which distinguish the Jew from the Theist, which are held and practised by the Jew and not by the Theist. But these doctrines and practices are clearly and confessedly on a lower level, less important and less fundamental in themselves than the doctrines which are or can be common both

to Theist and Jew. Therefore the result ensues that the essence of Judaism, which marks it off from all other religions, is the less important portion of it. Because its Theism may be held and practised by those who would deny that their creed is Judaism, Judaism itself is identified with those of its present elements which are secondary, local and particular. A divorce is effected between the differentiating essence and the central religious characteristic.

This theory can be held in various forms, according as stress is laid upon the distinguishing doctrines or upon the distinguishing rites. The doctrines which are included among the differentiating marks may be divided into two classes, and it is important for our present purpose to have a clear conception of them. The first class consists of specific doctrines respecting the Pentateuch and the Prophets, and is therefore the class which is affected by Biblical criticism. It comprises the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and twelfth articles of creed drawn up by Maimonides, and still universally maintained by an unsophisticated orthodoxy. No one who accepts the conclusions of criticism can believe in the first four of these five articles, and he can hardly believe in the fifth. When I say "believe," I mean believe in the same sense as the men of orthodoxy believe, and I imply the absence of all qualification and mental reserve.

The second class really consists only of a single doctrine, or, as I should prefer to say, of a single dogma. That dogma is "The Mission of Israel." It is a dogma which does mean different things to the orthodox Jew and to the "Jewish Unitarian," but I submit that it *has a real*, though a different, meaning to the latter as well as to the former. In the form, moreover, in which he holds it, *it is absolutely unaffected by Biblical criticism.*

So much for the distinguishing doctrines. But on account, I suppose, of the difficulties inherent in the first class, it is common now-a-days, since the revival of

Moses Mendelssohn's teaching by the school of Breslau, to lay far more emphasis upon the rites than upon the dogmas. The practical execution of the written and oral law—this, according to many authorities, is the essential characteristic of Judaism. And thus the essence of Judaism is altogether removed from the sphere of religious belief. There are people who are apparently willing to give up all the dogmas if only they may retain their beloved rites and ceremonies, retain them, be it observed, albeit emptied of all religious value, bereft of all religious life. Thus one pupil of the late Professor Graetz, obviously without realising the immense *Tragweite* of his own words, has quite complacently spoken of "theoretical heterodoxy united with practical orthodoxy" as a possible method of reconciling Judaism and criticism with one another. And another, who seems to occupy an ultra-orthodox position—for he unfeignedly rejoices that, as he thinks, "Reform has now well-nigh been stamped out of Germany"—defines orthodoxy as "nobility of mind, purity of purpose, true observance of the inherited law in *all* its details, enthusiasm for truth, and devoted piety."¹ It will be observed that the first, second and fourth of these several qualities which go to make up the definition of orthodoxy are purely moral, and do not therefore concern our present purpose. An atheist can show "nobility of mind, purity of purpose, and enthusiasm for truth" as well as an orthodox Jew. It is *just possible* that a "reform" Jew might also possess these qualities. As differentiating marks of orthodox Judaism they are therefore singularly inappropriate. We are left with "true observance of the inherited law in *all* its details, and devoted piety." Now "devoted piety" is again a phrase of doubtful propriety. It is inconveniently vague. For, if not a reform Jew, may not at least a Christian show "devoted piety"? But if "devoted piety" has any connection with the performance of rites

¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, September 18th, 1891, pp. 8 and 9.

and ceremonies, then it becomes equivalent to a "true observance of the inherited law in *all* its details," and in its present place is obviously otiose. At any rate the differentiating mark of Judaism in the opinion of this disciple of Breslau is purely ceremonial. We hear nothing of doctrine and dogma.

But from that very absence of dogma a strange result ensues. Here, perhaps, is the *via media* of which we have before observed the need. The men of Breslau, rather than any "Unitarian Jews," may be destined to reconcile Judaism with the criticism of the Bible, and with comparative religion. For that theory of Judaism which defines its essence as the "true observance of the inherited law in *all* its details" can surely readily accept all the conclusions of criticism, and if it dare call itself orthodox, then even orthodox Judaism is independent of criticism. But at what a price! What is the religious value of any rite except as the emblem of some religious truth, of some believed dogma, of some assured religious conviction? What real religious union is there between those who fulfil the law, believing it to be single, Mosaic, verbally inspired, literally true, and those who fulfil it indeed, and yet, like Prof. Graetz himself, believe it to be not single, not Mosaic, not verbally inspired, and not literally true? A "true observance of the inherited law in *all* its details" seems a purely formal observance, if the spirit which underlay the observance in the old believing days has fled away. And what constituted the spirit if not the beliefs through and because of which the law was fulfilled? An old-fashioned orthodox Jew would be somewhat astonished if you told him that, although you did not believe in the miracles of the law, did not believe in its Mosaic authorship, did not believe in its verbal inspiration, did not believe in its complete accuracy, you were nevertheless as orthodox and as much of a Jew as he, because forsooth you obeyed the precepts of the inherited law "in *all* their details." Legalist as that old-fashioned Jew is, he would yet be able to distinguish

between the spirit and the form, and estimate at its true value the husk when separate from the grain.

The Judaism which is all rite and no dogma has no religious significance. And widely parted as the "Unitarian Jew" may be from the older orthodoxy, that orthodoxy of belief is far more sympathetic to him than the new orthodoxy of practice. Between him and the men of Breslau there is no common ground whatever. He cannot away with theoretical unbelief and practical orthodoxy.

Where then is the Judaism which will accept neither of these rival orthodoxies to be found? It claims its right to existence by denying the accuracy of the contention that the essential features of the Jewish religion must be precisely those which lie outside its essential religious doctrines. I am not afraid of the verbal quibble that the Theist who holds and practises these doctrines (for some doctrines can only be held if they are also practised) must then be called a Jew, although he denies his Judaism. We are not going to give up our Judaism or cease to call it by its own name, because in the course of ages its most essential dogmas have found acceptance beyond its pale. There is no need to be frightened by a question of labels and terminology. Even if the religion we profess were limited to the doctrines which can be or are accepted by the Theist as well as the Jew, it is still Jewish theism, and as such can make good its title to the name of Judaism. It has indubitably come to us for the largest part through Jewish sources. It represents the present stage of development in the Jewish religion, and because it *is* a development, which has not denied but only enlarged the most essential doctrines of its earlier stages, it may still be called by the old name.

It must, however, be remembered that in addition to those essential doctrines respecting the nature and unity of God and his relation to humanity—the love of God by man and the rule of man by God—the moral law coloured and conditioned by its divine basis and author, the religious

life on earth and the hope of immortality hereafter, there is one narrower dogma which, because it is not touched by criticism or philosophy, it is open for the "Unitarian Jew" to add to his total store. That dogma is the mission of Israel, and that dogma we still retain. We do believe that the Divine Ruler and Educator of mankind chose out the nation of Israel for a peculiar religious task, and we do believe that even now, when the nation has been changed into a community, that task is not concluded. Between Agnosticism upon the one hand and Trinitarianism upon the other Judaism steers a middle course. Its Theism is opposed alike to a wonder-working superstition and to a soulless Deism. Who can say that an historical faith of such a nature may not even exercise a certain influence for good by the very fact of its existence? And as Judaism becomes more and more sensible of the unique position which it might claim among the religions of the civilised world, who can say that that silent influence may not gradually be exchanged for direct teaching and admonition? So believing, may we not still regard ourselves as Jews though we disbelieve in miracles, deny the unity and Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and *consequently* do certainly not observe "the inherited law in *all* its details"?

III.

People have yet to learn how the divine element in the Bible and the story which the Bible contains may still be recognized even after criticism, historical, literary, philosophical, has done its worst. Even as we are now accustomed to consider the preservation of the Jewish race since the days of Ezra as divinely willed, and its history as divinely controlled, although no miracles are claimed for the intervening 2,300 years, so must we learn to realise that its earlier history might also have been a part of the divine purpose in the educa-

tion of mankind, albeit the alleged miracles of the Bible are treated with the same incredulity as the alleged miracles in other early or sacred histories. The sense in which there can be and is a progress in religion, must be as well learnt and understood as the sense in which there can be and is a progress in morality. The estimate to be assigned to the spiritual heroes of olden days, to the Hoseas and Isaiahs of antiquity, will not thereby be diminished or invalidated: their light will not be dimmed. The conception of the Divine being is a progressive conception, and in certain ways any ordinary man or woman of to-day has a higher conception of him than Moses or Jeremiah. But that does not preclude Moses and Jeremiah having been immeasurably greater personalities than ourselves. At early and critical moments in the history of great ideas there arose great geniuses who showed the way and helped men forward. The position of such men and their relation to their own more developed conceptions in later times may be compared to the position of great mechanical inventors, and their relation to the subsequent improved products of their own discoveries. Contrasted with the best steam engines of to-day, the first steam engine constructed by Watt would, I imagine, seem clumsy; but no engineer would on that account think the less highly of the inventor's genius, or compare his own capacities, that yet result in far grander issues, with the constructive capacities of Watt. Big men, mighty masters in religion, contributed to the formation of Judaism and of Monotheism. That we see further than they, or that they too were limited by the religious environment of their own age, does not detract from their inspiration and originality. There is much in the Bible which is the direct outcome of their greatness, and it is hardly the less precious because of its local and temporary setting.

The true story of the formation of such central religious

ideas as Monotheism, Providence, and Immortality is clearly one of surpassing interest, and almost as clearly of surpassing difficulty. To study it is in itself a lesson in religion. For us Jews the most important written record of that story is the collection of writings commonly known as the Old Testament. But there are other records of great importance for the true telling of the story besides the Old Testament, inasmuch as these contain in a more or less perfect form the words and thoughts of great men who have contributed to the actual fulness of those central ideas as they are to-day conceived among us, and without whose genius the ideas would have been less relatively complete or articulate than now they are. Such writings we must also learn to revere. We must learn to recognise inspiration in them as well as in the Old Testament. And we shall assess and honour them thus highly in proportion to their essential greatness, together with their influence upon the upward religious development of mankind.

To this estimate of the Bible the dates and unities (or disunities) of particular books will make no difference. Criticism is of opinion that Moses did not say, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One." We accept its verdict without demur. The greatness and historic significance of the statement remain unaffected, either because its authorship is unknown, or because its date lies in the seventh century and not in the fourteenth. Philosophy does not allow us to believe that God himself spoke the Ten Commandments: their religious and ethical value is not impaired. For if we consider rightly, we have but one and the same standard by which to estimate that value, whether they were spoken by God or not.

If, again, it should be asked, Does the Old Testament fully and plainly teach all these essential doctrines which constitute the specific essence of the Judaism of to-day, and does it teach them with equal purity, the answer must indubitably be "No." But the fundamentals are in it, and every other book compared with it contains only accretion

and development. This implies that the difference in our own favour between the ethical and religious content of the Old Testament, and the ethical and religious content of Judaism to-day is at least partly to be found in other books outside the Hebrew canon. And this implication is capable of proof. Such books were written both by Jewish and non-Jewish authors. For we must not fear to draw the thoroughly Theistic deduction that God has taught the world religion and morality through the instrumentality of many races. Our solution of the critical problem must be achieved by a wider and larger Theism than has been known or realised hitherto. The Judaism which is to be fully reconciled to criticism must be more theistic than the Judaism which contradicted or ignored it. Some Jews even there are whose true place in the religious development of Judaism is still denied or misunderstood. St. Paul, for example, is one. He first taught the absolute equality of all races from the religious point of view. He was the first Jew to reject on religious grounds the religious privileges and prerogatives which had hitherto been claimed by Jewish teachers for their own race. But when that great idea was absorbed by Judaism it was itself purified and developed. For though Paul abolished the test of race, he substituted for it the wider but yet not wholly satisfactory test of a semi-intellectual adherence to a particular religious doctrine. The condition of the unbeliever is left doubtful. Modern Judaism in accepting Paul's overthrow of race-prerogative has enormously improved his doctrine by substituting a universal human equality before God, based not upon religious faith but upon moral character.

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Even such rough notes as these appear to establish the thesis that there can exist a phase of *Judaism* as capable of accepting and assimilating the results of criticism as the freest Unitarian Christianity. For the teaching of no one

age and the teaching of no one man constitute the Jewish religion. Because Judaism changes, it abides.¹

C. G. MONTEFIORE.

¹ Two practical difficulties have not been touched on in the above notes. First there is the difficulty of embodiment—of framing a new ritual or modifying an existing one to suit the Judaism which instead of colliding with criticism accepts it. Still I do not see that there is anything to prevent those who profess a Judaism of this kind from joining in such public institutions and rites as have come down to us from the historic past. We may freely join the worship of the Synagogue upon Sabbaths and Festivals, while at the same time endeavouring to gradually mould that worship into a truer accordance with our present religious ideas. Institutions which are the product of ideas must necessarily change more slowly than the ideas themselves. The Passover and the Day of Atonement will not mean to us what they mean to orthodoxy, but they are quite capable of receiving new spiritual meanings to fit them to a more developed faith. Secondly, there is the difficulty of education. Can such a conception of Judaism, and more especially can such an estimate of the Bible, be so presented as on the one hand to be intelligible to children, and on the other to retain its truth? Can children be brought up as religiously in this Judaism as in orthodoxy? I am getting more and more hopeful that these questions can be answered in the affirmative. I know that even those who themselves accept some critical conclusions are yet of opinion that these conclusions must be ignored in the teaching of the young. The question is difficult, and admits of argument on both sides. Yet if it be urged on the one hand that young persons must only have definite statements and opinions placed before them in religious teaching, and that it is only too easy for them to reject in later life superfluous dogmas and rites, it may on the other hand be maintained that a rigid honesty in religious teaching is a first and cardinal necessity, that nobody should teach that which he does not wholly himself believe, and lastly, (and above all), that the heavier the dogmatic charge the greater may be the sceptical recoil. For the argument that, since it is only too easy to throw off beliefs and rites, you should inculcate many in order that some at least may stick, is a dangerous one, and may even be turned against its user. Some may reject the whole mass of dogmas and rites together with equal impartiality. Nor is it impossible to imagine a teaching which would almost *ab initio* enable a child to perceive both the human and the divine elements contained within the Bible. Reverting once more to the parallel from mechanical inventions, would it not be possible to teach a child to look with the utmost awe and reverence upon the first printing press constructed by Gutenberg (if such a thing be in existence), at the same time pointing out to him its imperfections, and telling him of the improvements which other minds, carrying forward the great idea of the original inventor, had subsequently effected? Might it not be possible to work out the same sort of teaching for the Bible?